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Intangible and Tangible Heritage in a Cross-cultural Setting: Integrity Versus Profit

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ABSTRACT: The paper explores the impact of cross-cultural integration on the intangible and tangible heritage and its sustainability. It argues that the processes of acculturation generate a distancing between the original creators of the heritage and the narratives attached to the cultural entities in a new setting. The named detachment demises the originality and uniqueness of the local heritage expressed in language, rites, dressing, greetings, music, folklore, religion, cultural monuments, and sites. More so detrimental to the original 'spirit of the place,' are the new cultural modes imposed by time and change. In the context of the named challenges, this study aims to reinforce the significant role the original local culture plays in the progressively changing world. The defined cultural spaces of the local heritage, engrossed in the shared experiences and collective memories, enshrine the community cultural character and identity. These, in turn, provide an environment conducive to stability, safety, and an inspirational springboard for expressions evidenced both in tangible and intangible heritage. More so, it suggests that a clearly delineated cultural identity of the intangible heritage provides a motivational framework not only for creative expressions in the present but also a motivational for creative expressions in the future. `

1. INTRODUCTION: THE SOUTH SEA ISLANDS MUSEUM

The South Sea Islands Museum in Cooranbong, New South Wales, houses a significant collection of artifacts from the Pacific Islands. It holds an extensive and unique collection of artifacts and handicrafts recognized by renowned curators as the best collection in the Southern Hemisphere (visitlakemac.com.au). It includes photos and artifacts from a wide range of regions such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tahiti, The Gilbert Islands, Australia and New Zealand. As noted "Objects range from simple weaponry such as ax heads and clubs to sophisticated intricately woven baskets and head-dresses. All realms of life are explored; the museum contains idols and charms for spirit worship alongside items used for hunting and food preparation"(ssimuseum). The collections date from around 1800's donated gifts by missionaries working in the Pacific Islands region. The most beautiful artifact is the 16-metre war canoe highlighting the artistic beauty and the cultural skill of its builders.

2. THE CASE STUDY FRAMEWORK – THE GIANT WAR CANOE

At the same time, its historical significance seems detached from the original cultural roots and the narratives associated with the Giant War Canoes used by the Solomon Islands natives for head-hunting expeditions. The display caption reads as follow; "In 1959, the British Solomon Island Government used this canoe to transport the Duke of Edinburgh from the ship "Britannia" to the land. Twenty-six men peddled Prince Phillip to the shore. They then lifted the canoe with the guest seated mid-centre and carried him ashore…The canoe was brought to Australia in 1976 to be housed here for safe keeping."

The event describing the Duke's visit to Gizo, Solomon Islands appeared, as a feature article, in the *Australasian Record*, published in May, 1959 (Ferguson, 1959) The report highlighted the frantic preparations for the royal visit with few references to the "huge war canoes."

> But the last day or two was hectic. Small native-owned launched and dug-out canoes began bringing in families. And at last the huge was canoes with 20-30 paddlers swiftly swept ashore. It was thrill to hear the shouts of the island people when these canoes 40-50 feet in length hove in sight. They are very seldom seen these days. At full speed – twelve to thirteen knots-they circled our little mission vessels. To watch the paddles flashing in perfect unison, and listen to their knock at each stroke, accompanied by the blowing of a large shell, is to experience an excitement that not even missionary can forget (Ibid., 2).

The caption under the photo showing five of the war canoes reads, "A fleet of Solomon Island war canoes, the craftsmanship, and speed which so impressed the Royal visitor." The canoes were used to ferry the prince from the royal to the boat. As reported, during the short journey, "The Prince suggested to the peddlers near him, 'Give the District Commissioner a race!' So the two canoes raced part of the distance" (Ibid). It then reports that the maker of the canoe was one of the mission teachers, and it also refers to the beautiful inlaid work of the canoe and its "pearl decorated side of the prow" (Ibid.).

Nine years later in 1968, the giant war canoe arrived in Sydney. The Sydney Morning Herald photo displayed the dissembled parts of the canoe, and the caption read as follow. "Once used for savage head-hunting raids in the Solomon Islands, this 52ft was canoe had a humble arrival in Sydney yesterday, carefully "bandaged" in sacking as protection against the souvenir hunters" (The Sydney Morning Herald, August 1968). Further, it informs that after unloading it would be eventually stored in the South Pacific Islands Museum at Cooranbong, its current location. A month later the war canoe went on display at the Pacific Paradise cultural festival. The newspaper advertisement caption highlighted the canoe as "the last of the war canoes built by the head-hunters of the Solomon Islands. Magnificently decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay" (The Sydney Morning Herald, September 1968). Since, it's arrival the war canoe is one of the most admired artifacts in South Sea Islands Museum yet separated by time, culture, events, narratives and craftsmanship from its original "spirit of the place."

The preliminary analysis of the named sources highlights the impact the time-related distancing impose on a relationship between the intangible and tangible heritage. The descriptive words and phrases such as "craftsmanship," "speed," "race," "Duke's visit," "savage head-hunting raids" and "the last of the war canoes," generate a culturally oriented cognitive dissonance. It is evident that the current narratives associated with the war canoe retain a vague connection with its original cultural heritage. While, the predominant focus of the story links its relevance with more current events. Even though the war canoe resembles the skills of the original creators, the functional purpose of the 'war canoe' gradually changed with "the arrival of Europeans, traders, missionaries and British colonial administration" (http://australianmuesum.net). In consequence, the domineering European cultures set a wedge of demarcation between the intangible and tangible aspect of the war canoe.

3. THE CHALLENGE OF CULTURAL DISTANCING

In an attempt to preserve its cultural value, "the canoe races in the early 19th century replaced its role in the headhunting excursions" (Ibid). In contrast to the cross-culturally imposed changes, Vecco (2010, 323) argues that the approach to the cultural significance of tangible and intangible heritage cannot be founded on the "intrinsic quality of the object but on our ability to recognize their aesthetic, historic, scientific, social values." In this context, she calls for a contextually relevant approach based on the community's recognition of these values "upon which its own cultural identity can be built." Furthering Vecco's view, this paper underlines the significance of the intimate interplay between the intangible and tangible heritage and its contribution to the intrinsic value of the artifacts such as the 'war canoe' and its sustainability.

Swensen, Jerpasen, Saeter, Tveit (2013, 204) support this point of view suggesting,

> The tangible heritage can only be understood and interpreted through the intangible, and society and values are thus intrinsically linked (Munjeri, 2004). Focusing on the intangible as a separate issue has led to an unintended dualism: that of heritage being separated into 'tangible' remains and the intangible into meaning, values, memories and feelings.

The narratives, stories rites, and images transmit emotions of the life once lived in all its fullness and the passion. All these are translated into a variety of forms of tangible products associated with life in all its functions. Smith (2006) supports the holistic approach to the heritage stating. "There is a decided tendency within the international classification of heritage to define 'heritage' and the intangible heritage as two separate things, on the one thing the instrumental, material artifacts or structure, and, on the other hand, the cultural values." Naturally, time-related changes and cross-cultural integration play a significant role in the appropriation of the contextually relevant meaning to all forms of tangible heritage. Such meanings originate not only from expertise knowledge but also from sentimental memories attaching a personal self-imposed value to the 'war canoe' artifact. The following extract based on one's personal reflections illustrates the issue of cultural distancing imposing on the separation between the original intangible heritage and the intrinsic tangible heritage value of the 'war canoe.'

> As a child living in Cooranbong (NSW) I loved the South Sea Islands Museum at Sunnyside. My favourite exhibit was the enormous Solomon Islands war canoe. I admired the sleek black hull carved from a massive log, with its inlaid shell and decorated high prow and stern, wanting to climb into it and sit in one of the more than 20 paddling positions, imagining the water rushing past as it was propelled along. It was irrelevant to me that His Royal Highness Prince Philip had once sat in the large throne-like chair amidships, or that many years earlier it had been used to carry the first European woman to ride in a tomoko. I did not know that one day I would marry the great-granddaughter of that pioneering missionary or that we would be ceremonially ferried ashore in a replica canoe.

The personal reflection refers to cultural practices of the past such as "places of spirit worship," "head-hunting," "human sacrifices," cannibalistic inhabitants," "people of war," "skull mounds" and the "war canoe." It is of interest to note the value determining the focus of the reflections namely, "transformation of cultural practices, way of life, knowledge, health and purpose" (Ibid.). Hence, the cultural value of "war canoe" seems to be embedded in the transformational journey from the past to experiential moments of the present. "Near our destination we transferred to a waiting replica war canoe, were given woven headpieces to match those of our 20 bare-chested engines, and, accompanied by conch shell trumpet, were paddled as guests of honor the rest of the way to Bareho" (Ibid.). The Australian Museum records a similar account of the transitional nature of the meaning associated with the war canoes.

> By the time he returned to Roviana Lagoon, the colonial authorities has discouraged the practice of headhunting, with the last raid from Roviana occurring in 1902, just as the Aus-

> tralian crawl surged into the international stage. Local people maintained the knowledge of how to make the tomoko (they are still made today), and Harry commissioned one in 1912 for the Christmas races at the local Methodist Mission (Mitchell)

Further, the article also outlines the cross-cultural nature of the change connecting the "head-hunter's war canoe with Australia Day celebrations and that of another Australian icon 'Australian crawl' swimming stroke (Mitchel, 2015).

It may be observed that any dominant cross-cultural integration and what Aswani (2000, 45), defines, as, "obfuscated" discourses tend to minimize the value of the original bygone heritage. Further, it contributes to the formation of what this paper defines as an intrinsic value breaker contributing to the process of distancing between intangible and tangible heritage. In this context, the value of a particular tangible object is measured through the lenses of a new cultural experience at the cost of losing the intrinsic value of the artifact installed in the object by its original creators. Figure 1 illustrates the described impact of cultural distancing on the level of relational interphase between intangible and tangible heritage. The current study adopted and modified the model from Swensen's (2012, 212) study illustrating the close relationship between people's appreciation of places they "knew well and that played a role in their routines."

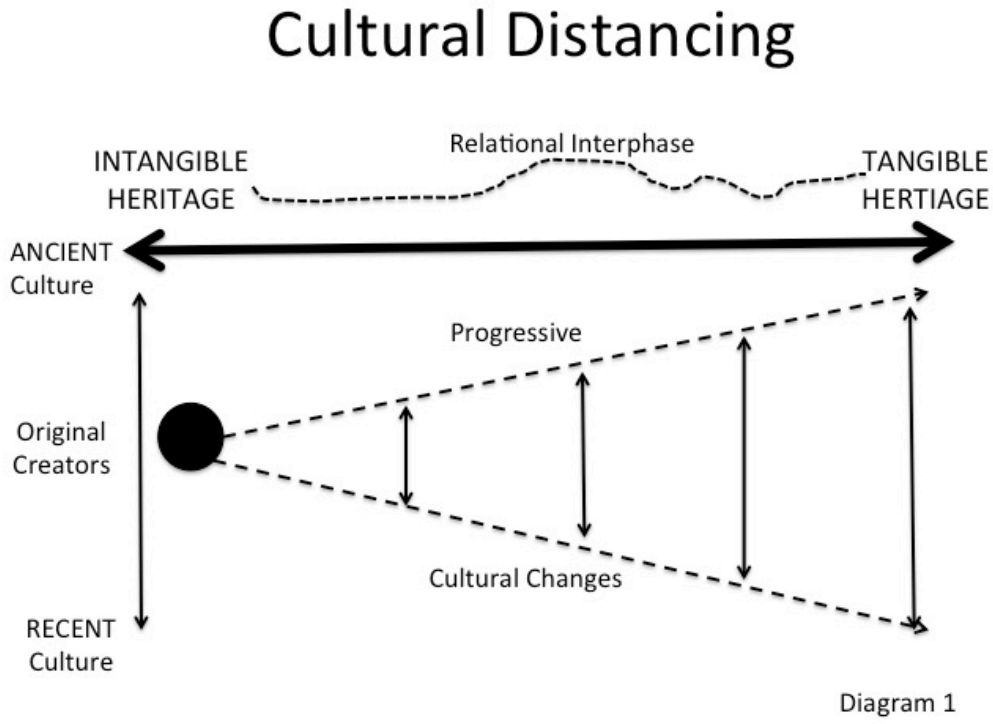


Diagram 1

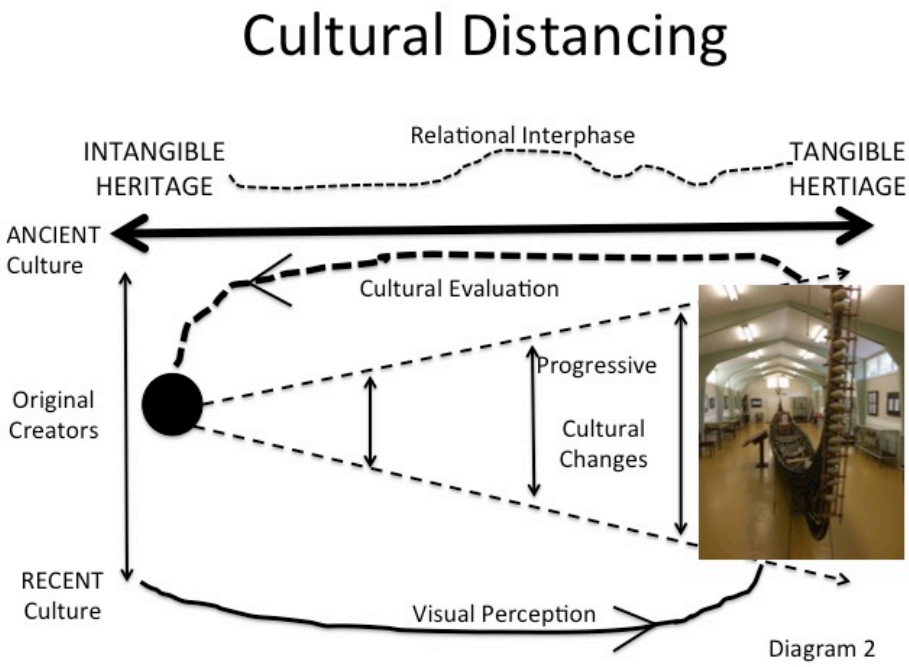
The modified model demonstrates that the time related cultural changes impact the close relational interphase between intangible and tangible heritage. The further the tangible artifacts move away from the point of the original creation, the more inclined it becomes to lose its intrinsic value. The cultures and people living in closer time-oriented proximity impose new meanings based on relevant to its time and places experiences. In the named process, the original setting of the "war canoe" is still recognized by the used of language such as "spirit wor-

ship," "head-hunting," "human sacrifices," "cannibalism," and "war." However, it's intrinsic value placed upon the object links with events relating to places and events people knew and that played a significant role in their heritage. "I did not know that one day I would marry the great-granddaughter of the pioneering missionary or that we would be ceremonially ferried ashore in a replica canoe" (Record, 2016). Here one notices the transitional impact of the intrinsic value breaker. "The local war canoe was repurposed from raiding vessel to mission transport" (Ibid.) This trend is supported by the observation and responses shared with the current writer by visitors viewing the 'war canoe." Of a sample of one hundred responses collated over the period of seven years, seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated an interest in the displayed artifact about the royal visit without taking any specific interest in the origins of the canoes. Only twenty-five percentage asked questions relating its original history.

As observed, the time-oriented detachment demises the original uniqueness of the local heritage expressed in language, rites, music folklore, religion, monuments, and sites. The new cultural setting to imposes processes of reinterpretation and adjustment to the new environment. Aswani (2000, 39) provides an excellent study by placing the intrinsic value of the war canoes in the context of the ethnohistory of Roviana [Solomon Islands District] predatory head-hunting. In contrast to the described challenges, he outlines the significance of understanding the value of the tangible objects of the past as "political symbols," and the role they played in "their social, ritual and historical significance." He argues, "Such an indigenous view is undoubtedly essential" to the understanding of the spirit of the place (Ibid.) With this aim in focus, the study proceeds to explore intrinsic value of the "war canoes" in its original cultural setting.

4. THE WAR CANOE AND ITS ANCESTRAL CREATORS

The contemporary lenses ascribe to the war canoe characteristics from an observable distance. Some the of early records refer to the beauty of the "high curving prows decorated with pearl shell and carving of fish, birds and heads," its size and the capacity to carry up to fifty men with an elevated seat for the chief and its speed. From this perspective, the value of war canoe derives from its physically noticeable aesthetic beauty. However, separated from the original 'spirit of the place,' this tangible item loses the intrinsic dimension of its spiritually imbedded indigenous framework. In the original state, the decorated objects of visual admiration were "the divine signifiers and visible manifestations of authority" Hence, as illustrated in figure 2, it is vital to retrace the value of the intangible objects through the lenses of the social, ritual and historical significance of its cultural setting. (Aswani, 93, 42).



The oral tradition connects the Solomon Islands war canoes with headhunting invasion by the Roviana headhunters. In the eyes of a contemporary life, such practices appear as cruel and barbaric. However, in the light of the social, religious and political life of the indigenous cultures the seemingly cruel practices were used as means to secure domineering, authoritarian superiority. As expressed by Aswani and Sheppard (2003) the named practices functioned as a vehicle to legitimize political power. Its origins flourished on the fertile soil demanding not only the legitimization of the tribal, territorial power and control but one necessitating the creation of the adequate vehicle to accomplish the set goals. Aswani (2000) supports such view with a local allegory.

> The Kalege Mateana from Parara had a stone war canoe (tomoko). She asked her son to make the canoe fit for fishing. They built a canoe made from stone. The son went to inaugurate the canoe and asked dolphins to tow the canoe. They went far away until they arrived to Lauru. There he took no fish. When the Lauru people saw him they wante to kill him, but he killed everyone. He said to himself, "Oh! I have been unlucky taking fish, but I have been able to kill many men." So he cut off their heads. He took the heads because in burial custom they were taken and left in the ancestral shrines. When the son returned the mother was angry because he had not taken fish. The boy responded that he had collected heads and that he had inaugurated the canoe. The woman was not happy, because she worried of the future enmity. The women sank the canoe in a place where today a stone resembles a canoe. The origin of head-hunting, then, is related to the concept of va-peza.

The allegory demonstrates the closely knitted relationship between intangible and tangible heritage woven into the fabrics of life experience. It also gave the foundational impetus to the construction of the more technologically advanced war canoe, based on the Tiola, or the spirit story ("man go to fight). "Before, people did not know how to make the tomoko (war canoe). But when Tiola came to Nusa Roviana from Simbo he told the Vuragare people how to make the tomoko using certain material" (Ibid). The war canoe emerged as a product of the creative minds of the people who translated their story into the visible embodiment of their dreams. Hence, the war canoe was not merely a physical structure but rather as illustrated in the photograph "the high bow and stern of the canoe were designed to follow the tail of Tiola" (Ibid.).

It's important to note that, what for the modern viewer appears as the tangible artistic object displayed for visual admiration, for the inhabitants of Roviana, the war canoes were an integrated part of cultural practices embedded in socio-economic and politico-religious fabrics. In such cultural framework, one notices a "constant interaction among the artifacts and images and the people who produced them" (Waite, 2000, 116). The shells, the decorative images, and the skulls stood as motivational symbols designed as a means to an end.

> The people wondered where they could find the power to consecrate the tomoko. Tiola told them to make a canoe icon (nguzunguzu) and place it on the bow of the canoe. The dog sat down and folded its legs and said "like this". Tiola could now follow them in was expeditions. The nguzunguzu conferred upon them the power of Tiola and prevented the Kesoko spirit from traversing the bow of the tomoko and jinxing the expedition (Aswan, 44).

Waite (2000, 120) highlights the spiritual significance of the symbolism embedded in the carving and decoration of the war canoe. In its original context, the canoe prow figureheads were placed just above the water line with the aim to protect the warriors from harm and danger during the storms while at sea.

The brief survey of the symbolism associated with the technical aspect of the war canoes such as size (power) and speed (efficiency) demonstrate the spiritual dimension of tangible objects during their functional prime. It also suggests that the emerged tangible objects were much more than an artistic expression of a creative mind. They embodied a spiritual meaning.

5. APPLICATION

The study aimed to demonstrate that the detachment from the cultural roots demises the uniqueness of the local heritage. It also argued for the close integrated relationships between intangible and tangible heritage woven into the fabric of cultural practices. The focus of the undertaken case study, namely the "Giant War Canoe" is used as an example showing the impact of the progressive cultural changes exert on the intrinsic value and meaning of the tangible heritage. By no means does the paper aim to justify the cultural practices associated with the head-hunting raids. Rather, it reinforces the significant role the contextual understanding of heritage places on the on the appreciation of its significance in the progressively changing global cultural environment. It is evident that the imposed by colonial authorities ban on the head-hunting expedition contributed to a significant shift in the cultural use of the war canoes. While the knowledge of how to build canoe remained known among its inhabitants, the use of the canoe underwent a transitional change. Hence, its value engendered by the original creators came under the imposed scrutiny of new cultural lenses. As an example, this cross-cultural influence may be noticed on the high bow of the war canoe in the South Sea Island Museum. Rather than replicating its originally assigned cultural symbols positioned at the water level of the canoe, it displays the royal crown honoring the Duke's visit to the island.

The question requiring consideration relates to the value of retaining the contextual understanding of the intangible and tangible understanding of heritage. Is it simply for the sake of developing an attitude of cultural superiority over the seemingly less sophisticated cultures? The brief study suggests that a reflective analysis suggests few valuable lessons. Firstly, the interchangeable reflection between visual perception imposed by progressive changes and cultural evaluation, as illustrated in diagram 2, restores the originally implanted relational cohesiveness between the intangible and tangible heritage. In consequence, it minimizes the impact of the named intrinsic value breaker exposing readers to a holistic appreciation of the narratives, stories rites, and images that transmit emotions of the life once lived in all its fullness. The stories

linked with birth, life and purpose of the canoes raise the value of the tangible object beyond its material necessity. Rather, invested with the symbolic emblems the wooden vessels transformed into spiritual safe-haven protected by the divine powers. Secondly, the new advancement in the technological skills of its creators gave the tribes a motivational winning edge (speed) to conquer, not, as stand-alone loners, but as a community (size of the boat). Thirdly, the unique spaces of cultural memory unfold the depth of human genius to face life's challenges creatively and to be sustained by a motivational story. In this sense, the defined cultural spaces of the local heritage, engrossed in the shared experiences and collective memories, enshrined the community cultural character and identity. These, in turn, provide an environment conducive to stability, safety, and an inspirational springboard for expressions evidenced both in tangible and intangible heritage.

This paper suggests that a clearly delineated cultural understanding of the relationship between the intangible and tangible heritage provides a motivational framework not only for creative expressions in the present but also a motivational framework for creative expressions in the future. More so importantly the named focus safeguards the heritage from the globally imposed, business oriented and market driven products. In this context, the sustainability of the intangible and tangible heritage is not measured by profit-oriented goals but because of its intrinsic cultural value invested by the creative genius of the original creators.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the impact of the cross-cultural integration on the intangible and tangible heritage. It also argued that the processes of acculturation generate a distancing between the original creators of the heritage and the narratives attached to the cultural entities in a new setting. The paper delineated the arguments based on the case study of Giant War Canoe housed at the South Sea Islands museum showing how the contemporary understanding of its value is detached from the original cultural background and more affiliated with recent historical events. It proposed that this focus enhanced a culturally imposed cognitive dissonance. Further, it suggested that to bridge the cross-culturally imposed gap, intangible and tangible heritage play a significant role in determining the intrinsic value of the artifacts and to provide a relation cohesiveness imposed the progressive changes. With this view, the study provided a brief account of the origins of war canoes highlighting the significance of the symbolism embedded in the original war canoes highlighting the spiritual dimension of the tangible objects during the prime cultural time of the war canoes. It concluded that a clearly delineated cultural understanding of the relationship between the intangible and tangible heritage engendered a motivational framework for the creative expression for the present and the future. More so importantly it safeguards the sustainability of the artifacts from the profit-oriented and market-driven goals.

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